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P. Mills, DONIA

TRILOGY OF SHORT STORIES

Soe 4.01.4 Lucia

# A Cuban Epic in the Land of the Free

By Donia Mills  
Star-News Staff Writer

Thanks to the loosening of Cuban trade restrictions that place works of art in the same category as cigars, Humberto Solas's 1968 epic "Lucia" can finally be seen in the land of the free and the home of the brave. You can see it right now, in fact, at the Janus 2 Theater — and it's certainly a film worth seeing, a visual and ideological *tour de force* no matter what country it comes from.

"Lucia" is actually a trilogy of three short stories totaling 2½ hours, each centering around a young woman named Lucia, each set in a different revolutionary period of Cuban history.

**THE FIRST** Lucia (Raquel Revuelta) is a prim, young, upper-class spinster for whom the bloody civil war of 1895 is initially just another intrigue to gossip about after church, a way of alleviating boredom during the long days and nights of Victorian leisure.

As the camera carcens from the drawing room over primitive vignettes of carnage and poverty and madness outside, Lucia develops an unwise passion for a Spanish gentleman and, inadvertently, betrays her brother and his guerilla comrades in their mountain

"LUCIA" — A Tri-Continental release of an Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematografica Production, produced by Raul Canosa, written and directed by Humberto Solas, photographed in black and white by Jorge Herrera, music by Leo Brower; with Raquel Revuelta, Esclinda Nunez, Adela Legra. At the Janus 2 Theater.

hideaway to a detachment of Spanish soldiers.

The second Lucia (Esclinda Nunez) is a chipper middle-class girl who loves and stands by one of the idealistic rebels who shot up the streets of Havana in the aborted struggles of 1932.

Solas outlines clearly here the enemies of the revolution: the impatience of youth, the blind self-absorption of their elders, pleasures of the flesh, flagging spirits. In grief and temporary defeat after her husband's death, Lucia turns a tear-stained face to the audience at the fadeout as if seeking an answer to the question, What did he die for?

**THE ANSWER** is given by the third Lucia (Adela Legra), a "classless" Cuban woman of the mid-1960s who has found the meaning of life in the harvesting of sugarcane and immersion in a common cause. Liberated from the evils of Yankee Imperialism, Lucia has now only to liberate herself from the militant jealousy

of her newlywed husband, who is possibly the worst male chauvinist pig in the entire Communist bloc.

"Lucia" is a shrewd paeon to proletarian revolutions that intensifies its pitch by focusing on an oppressed majority within an oppressed majority: women in Cuba. The three women in the film, by extension, come eventually to symbolize the nation itself, as seen through Socialist eyes: raped and betrayed in the first part, confused and led astray in the second, emerging triumphant in the last.

There are only three sympathetic male figures in the entire trilogy, each one a young revolutionary working in his own way for his own time. The first two die in the struggle but the third, a *sympatico* tutor from the city who is teaching Lucia to read and write, carries out his mission successfully and presumably goes on to educate other Lucias in turn.

The rebellious wife of the final segment is obviously Solas's proud portrait of the enlightened Cuban of the Future; the crudely scrawled farewell letter she writes her husband, as the first exercise of her newly learned skill, is in its way as profoundly revolutionary an act as all the machine-gun attacks that preceded it.

THIS modern episode is also very lively, funny, and appealing in its world-view, laughter perhaps being the most effective new opiate of the imperialist masses. For indeed, every image, every editing decision in "Lucia" contributes to Solas's complex web of political and social commentary.

Superficially unrelated, the three stories are actually marching all the while through a neatly reasoned dialectic pattern that works on a remarkable number of stylistic levels. Solas takes us from high tragedy to domestic comedy, insistent melodrama to lighthearted slapstick, romanticism to pragmatism, sexual repression to sexual insouciance.

"Lucia" is an important landmark of the new Cuban cinema, a rich and rare instance of peaceful coexistence between art and ideology.